



Korea, Republic of

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 38,023 square miles and its population is approximately 48 million. According to a 1995 government survey, when the population was an estimated 44,600,000, the numbers of adherents to the predominant religions were: Buddhism, 10,321,012; Protestantism, 8,760,336; Roman Catholicism, 2,950,730; Confucianism, 210,927; Won Buddhism, 86,923; and other religions, 267,996. There were 21,593,000 citizens who did not practice any religion. The percentage of adherents of each faith has remained approximately the same in recent years.

No official figures are available for the number of followers of other religions, which include the Elijah Evangelical Church, the Jesus Morning Star Church, the All People's Holiness Church, Muslims, the Unification Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Buddhism has approximately 25 orders. The Catholic Church has 16 dioceses, including 1 based in Seoul. There are about 83 Protestant denominations, including the Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches, and the Korean Gospel Church Assembly.

Among those practicing a Christian faith, 41.7 percent reported that they attended religious services or rituals at a church or temple at least once a week. Six percent responded that they attended religious services 2 to 3 times per month; 9.4 percent once per month; 6.8 percent once every 2 to 3 months; 26.9 percent once per year; and 9.2 percent did not attend services. Among practicing Buddhists, 1.2 percent responded that they attended religious services.

There are approximately 20 Protestant and 11 Catholic missionary groups operating in the country. The Protestant groups include: Christians in Action, Korea; the Church of the Nazarene, Korea Mission; the Overseas Mission Fellowship; World Opportunities International, Korea Branch; World Vision; Global Mission Partnership; and Serving In Mission. Among the Catholic missionary groups are the Missionaries of Guadeloupe, the Maryknoll Fathers, and the Little Brothers of Jesus.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion, and the Government does not subsidize or favor a particular religion.

There are no government-established requirements for religious recognition. The Traditional Temples Preservation Law protects cultural properties including Buddhist temples, which receive some subsidies from the Government for their preservation and

upkeep.

The Government does not require or permit religious instruction in public schools. Private schools are free to hold religious activities.

The Religious Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism takes the lead in organizing groups such as the Korea Religious Council and the Council for Peaceful Religions to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding. The bureau also is responsible for planning regular events such as the Religion and Art Festival, the Seminar for Religious Leaders, and the Symposium for Religious Newspapers and Journalists.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government currently provides no exemption or alternative civilian service for those who have a religious objection to duty in the armed forces. According to the Military Manpower Administration (MMA), members of the Jehovah's Witnesses account for almost 99 percent of the 755 imprisoned in 2004 for refusing military service. They are allowed to conduct their own religious services in prison. During the period covered by this report, the issue of conscientious objectors continued to be discussed by the public and in the courts. In August 2004, the Constitutional Court ruled that the country's conscription law does not violate the guarantee of religious freedom. In September 2004, the Seoul District Court reversed an earlier decision by finding that three conscientious objectors were guilty of violating the Military Service Law. Two persons were sentenced to 18-month prison terms and the third person was fined 1 million won.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. In June 2004, angry citizens demonstrated at the mosque in Seoul for about a month following the beheading of Korean hostage Kim Sun-il in Iraq. The Government provided security and protection to the mosque but did not interfere with the demonstrations as they were legal assemblies. According to the Institute for Middle East Studies, once the anger over the beheading subsided, Muslims in Korea returned to their normal routine and worshipped freely.

Religious leaders regularly met both privately and under government auspices to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. These meetings were given wide and favorable coverage by the media.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials also met regularly with members of various religious communities to discuss issues related to human rights.

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